

# Backbone Basics:

## 234 years of Army leadership

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**A**merican Revolution. The history of the U.S. Army NCO starts in 1775 with the birth of the Continental Army. Like the Army itself, the NCO Corps did not copy the fundamental roles of just the British Army; instead it blended traditions of the British, French and Prussian armies to create its own unique institution. As the American political system progressed during the years, the NCO Corps distinguished itself from its European counterparts as well. In 1778, at Valley Forge, Inspector General Friedrich von Steuben, a Prussian-German Army Officer, standardized NCO duties and responsibilities for the Continental Army NCO Corps. Before this, there was very little standardization in what the NCO's true role was in the new Continental Army. In his publication, *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, commonly called the "Blue Book," von Steuben set forth the duties and responsibilities of the NCO ranks at that time.

There were five NCO ranks — corporal, sergeant, first sergeant, quartermaster sergeant and sergeant major. When Von Steuben wrote his publication, it became the primary regulation for the Army for the next 30 years. Von Steuben was the first to refer to the NCO Corps as the "backbone" of the Army and his regulation established the centerpiece for NCO duties and responsibilities from 1778 to the present. The development of the NCO Corps helped sustain the Continental Army through severe hardship toward finally achieving U.S. independence in 1783.

It was customary during battles that NCOs were to "fire rapidly and true" and also close gaps created by casualties. NCOs were responsible for keeping men silent during night missions, while leading them through the terrain. This was a key factor during the Battle of Stony Point, where the bayonet training received from von Steuben played a critical role in the charge to capture the fort from the British.

NCOs wore an epaulet, a French word meaning "little shoulder," to signify their rank. Sergeants wore red epaulets while corporals wore green. It was in 1779 that sergeants began to wear two epaulets while corporals retained their single epaulet. It



LEFT: An unidentified sergeant poses for a picture circa World War I. (Photo courtesy of Library of Congress) RIGHT: SGT Alexis Delapaz, B Battery, 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery, 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, stands guard in al Alam, Iraq, June 23. (Photo by Luke P. Thelen, Joint Combat Camera Center Iraq)

was not uncommon that a Soldier would often spend their entire career within the same regiment. If a Soldier were to change regiments, he would not take his rank with him; the stripes remained with the regiment.

At that time, all promotions that a Soldier received came directly from the regimental commander. No NCO could transfer in grade from one regiment to the other without the permission of the General in Chief of the Army, who was the Commanding General of the U.S. Army.

During the American Revolutionary War, historians indicate that only three Soldiers were awarded the Badge of Military Merit for their acts of heroism. All three were NCOs and received the award from General George Washington himself. The Badge of Military Merit was a purple heart with a floral border and the word "merit" inscribed across the center. The badge is the predecessor to both the Medal of Honor, which was first awarded during the Civil War, and the Purple Heart, which was first awarded in 1927. After the American Revolutionary War, the award faded from use, though it was never abolished. The award of the badge was not recommended

again until after World War I.

In the years following the American Revolution, many changes and additions were made to the NCO ranks leading up to the War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War in 1846. The NCO Corps continued to evolve and adapt with time.

**W**ar of 1812 & Mexican-American War. In February 1812, Congress ordered the creation of a 50,000-man volunteer army. When war was declared on Great Britain in June 1812, there were roughly 7,000 men in the regular service. Many were under the command of senior officers who lacked experience in combat or leading troops. It fell on the NCO Corps, specifically corporals, who were the primary trainers at the time, to prepare the Soldiers for combat against the British.

For two years, war raged across America with the Battle of New Orleans being the last military conflict in January 1815. The Treaty of Ghent was signed in Paris in December 1814 ending the War of 1812; yet, with communications taking a great amount of time to reach their destination, both armies were unaware the war had ended.

After the war, Congress and the War Department continued to institute new

programs and publications to enhance the NCO Corps. The War Department first acknowledged the NCO chevrons in 1821. Sergeants major and quartermaster sergeants wore a worsted chevron on each arm above the elbow; sergeants and senior musicians wore one on each arm below the elbow and corporals wore one on the right arm above the elbow. The practice lasted until 1829.

In 1824, at Fort Monroe, Va., the first school for centralized Soldier instruction was opened. Instead of training officers and NCOs individually, the school focused on training entire units. Though it was suspended from time to time, this became the precursor for all centralized modern technical training Soldiers now receive. A year later, the first attempt at a systematic method for NCO selection was made. Unless overriding considerations came up, regimental commanders were expected to accept the company commanders' recommendations for company NCOs.

In 1829, *The Abstract of Infantry Tactics* was published and provided new instructions for training NCOs. The main goal of the publication was to ensure that all NCOs possessed "an accurate knowledge of the exercise and use of their firelocks, the manual exercise of the Soldier and of firing and marching."

A sixth rank, ordnance sergeant, was added to the NCO ranks in 1832. It was a specialized rank designated to those with the duties of receiving and preserving the ordnance, arms, ammunition and other military stores of the post that he was assigned.

Dragoon regiments, which were considered elite mounted rangers, were

created by Congress in 1833. To show their elite status, Dragoons reintroduced the chevron, with the chevron pointing down on their uniform, for use by NCOs.

In an effort to add more prestige to the NCO Corps, a distinctive sword was adopted in 1840. To this day, the model 1840 NCO sword remains in use during special ceremonial occasions.

With the annexation of Texas in 1845, along with America's desire for more land, the Mexican-American war began in 1846. During the war, the U.S. raised 115,000 troops; 73,000 were volunteers. The volunteers often elected their officers and NCOs by popular vote based on public standing or previous military experience. NCOs often led small detachments against the Mexican Army and Indians to discourage attacks on settlers.

During the war, in 1847, the chevron again was adjusted, this time worn in inverted "V" direction. It would stay this way until the 1850s when the War Department would again make changes to the NCO and their uniforms.

The Mexican-American War officially ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848. After the war, the U.S. gained more than 500,000 square miles to expand, creating a larger area of responsibility for the NCOs to defend.

After the Mexican-American War, very few changes occurred for the NCO. It wasn't until 13 years later when the Civil War began that the Army would call upon its "backbone" to lead it in one of the darkest hours in American history.

**Civil War.** After the Mexican-American War, NCOs found themselves leading small units into the new frontier to defend

settlements against Indian raids and set up in the newly gained land out west.

In 1849, a young man named Percival Lowe enlisted into the U.S. Army's elite Dragoon unit. Lowe used his knowledge of the land and equestrian skills to make an impact immediately in his unit. Lowe would achieve the rank of first sergeant in just over two years. In 1853, Lowe, along with other NCOs in his company, established the "company court martial." It was not yet recognized by the Army, but this was the first time that NCOs could enforce discipline in their Soldiers for breaking regulations without dealing with lengthy proceedings.

During the 1850s, changes in the chevron and epaulet continued to occur. After declaring in 1847 that the chevron would be worn in the inverted "V" position, it was changed to point down, where it remained until the regulations of 1902. The epaulet became acceptable to wear in dress uniform, but was not permitted with the normal duty uniform.

Major changes to U.S. weaponry occurred in the 1850s that added greatly to the fire power and accuracy of the weapons being used by Soldiers. The Sharps Carbine and Joslyn Rifle, which both used breech loading, added a new dimension of training for Soldiers. NCOs again took the lead ensuring that all Soldiers in the unit were trained and capable to fire the weapons quickly and accurately.

In April 1861, the leadership skills learned from fighting in the Mexican-American War and defending the new frontier from Indian attacks, along with training new Soldiers in advanced weapons and equestrian skills, came full circle for NCOs as cannons under confederate flags opened fire on Fort Sumter, S.C., officially beginning the Civil War.

NCOs would be called on not only to lead the lines of skirmishers, but also to carry the flags and regimental colors of their units. NCOs were charged with this dangerous and deadly task so commanders could define the locations of their units on the field to ensure the units' proper placement and direction.

As the war progressed, new tactical and organizational changes occurred along with developing technology in the form of railroads, telegraph communications, steam ships and other innovations that would affect the ranks of the NCO.

Technical jobs, in the form of ordnance, sappers and hospital stewards, now would receive a higher pay, even if they were not of the same rank, than those who were in tactical jobs.



Civil War: Union Soldiers stand near a M1861 three-inch rifle. (Fires archive)



The use of more open battlefield formations further enhanced the NCO's tactical combat leadership. The NCO took on multiple tasks on the battlefield at a higher rate than in any previous war.

In September 1862, the NCO's tactical proficiency was pushed to the limit as the Battle at Antietam raged in Maryland. An entire day of attack and counterattacks from both the Union and Confederate Armies resulted in the single bloodiest day in American military history with an estimated 23,000 men losing their lives.

The Civil War continued to incorporate different racial and ethnic groups into the Army, not as individuals, but entire units. After the war, ethnic units discontinued, but the trend of racial units would continue into the Indian Wars, most famous being the "Buffalo Soldiers" of the Cavalry Regiments.

Four years after the war broke out in South Carolina, 600,000 Americans paid the ultimate price for freedom. The war ended in April 1865 with GEN Robert E. Lee surrendering his army to GEN Ulysses S. Grant in Virginia.

With the Civil War behind them, the NCO again looked for opportunities to further training and education across the Army. The NCO would have to do this while battling constant engagements with Native Americans during the Indian Wars of the 1870s to 1890s leading into the Spanish-American War in 1898.

**Indian Wars and Spanish-American War.** In the years following the Civil War, the Army was involved in numerous engagements across the nation while fighting in the Indian Wars of the 1870s to 1890s. These battles, unlike the large scale conflicts found in the Civil War, consisted of numerous scattered skirmishes across vast areas with no decisive battles that signaled the end of the wars. The NCO was relied upon heavily during these random engagements for his knowledge, expertise and experience to lead small units into battle.

In the west, besides engaging in random conflicts with the Indians, NCOs and junior Soldiers often served as bakers, blacksmiths or guards. They also would repair bridges and roads, or build and repair fortifications and houses. With these tedious tasks, constant threat of attacks and very poor pay, desertion was common in the Army. NCOs had to maintain and improve the quality of life and morale of the troops to reduce the rate of desertion.

By 1870, the Artillery School at Fort Monroe had re-opened along with a new Signal Corps school for training NCOs



Indian Wars: A rifle team at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center)

and officers. Efforts to provide the same training for NCOs in other career fields did not attract the same support as many believed that experience in the field, not a classroom, is what made a good NCO in combat career fields.

In the 1870s, Army regulations came out limiting the number of enlisted married men in the Army. Despite this, nature won out and helped begin the transformation of Army posts into communities. The first retirement system for enlisted men was created in 1885; anyone who had served for 30 years could retire with three-quarters of his active duty pay.

In 1898, the U.S. declared war on Spain beginning the Spanish-American War. When war was declared, the Army only had 26,000 men. The War Department began asking for volunteers, allowing National Guard units that were formed already to volunteer and serve as a unit. By the conclusion of the war, the U.S. raised 275,000 men to fight against Spain.

Requiring the volunteers to be fully equipped and prepared for combat, NCOs went to work training the troops for battle. The process started off slowly with some volunteer units never seeing the front line of combat.

The war lasted four months, and combat was in the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico and Cuba. The most immediate threat for NCOs dealing with these engagements was not the Spanish soldiers, but instead the threat of disease. Constantly having to brief and maintain the health of their troops, NCOs were fighting against two enemies. An estimated 3,000 lives were lost during the war with 90 percent coming from disease.

After the war, Cuba gained its independence; Puerto Rico and Guam ceded to the U.S.; and the U.S. purchased the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million. With the newly gained land, the U.S. had to station more than one-third of the Army overseas to deal with such conflicts as the Philippine Insurrection and Boxer Rebellion. This expansion created a need for additional troops and modernization across the Army.

This modernization had a direct effect on the NCO Corps with new technology and new pay grades. The Army was forced to fight industry for technical workers. Congress passed a law in 1908 to reward those Soldiers in technical fields with higher salaries, while Soldiers in combat fields remained the same. An infantry sergeant major made \$25 to \$34 a month, while a sergeant in the signal corps made \$34 to \$43 and a master electrician would make \$75 to \$84 a month.

The NCO instructions provided in Von Steuben's regulations grew to 417 pages in 1909 when the *Noncommissioned Officers Manual* was formally written. One of the main topics of the manual was discipline and the treatment of junior Soldiers. Its instructions stressed that discipline should be uniform, just and not humiliating.

With new guidelines governing its role in the Army and the conflicts of the Indian Wars and Spanish-America War behind them, the NCO Corps continued forward not realizing it was preparing itself for a war on a scale that it had never participated in before — World War I.

**World War I.** In June 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir

to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated; an event that many attribute as one of the main underlining moments that led to World War I, known as “the war to end all wars.” Not initially becoming involved in the war itself, the U.S. wasted no time preparing itself for the possibility of joining the Entente Powers in their struggle against the Central Powers.

NCOs, specifically corporals, began training Soldiers in what would be the first massive training of men the U.S. had ever seen. By the time the war ended in 1918, NCOs had trained four million men, of which one million went overseas. World War I forced NCOs to use and teach new tactics, as gas warfare became a prominent method of attack by both sides in the war. In addition to the standard land navigation, weapon familiarization and tactical maneuvers training, NCOs taught the proper wear and use of gas masks, meaning multiple trips into the gas chamber. The war also introduced the use of trenches, which protected Soldiers from enemy fire and also connected the front and rear lines, allowing wounded to be transported on and off the line, along with supplies.

In 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany, officially entering World War I. By the summer of 1918, the U.S. was sending 10,000 troops a day into France to fight alongside its allies. In June 1918, the 2nd Division made the first offensive maneuver by an American division at the villages of Bouresches and Vaux, France. It was a costly offensive with 9,777 casualties, but it helped stop the German offensive and brought a new moral boost to the Entente Powers.

The war ended in July 1919 with the signing of various treaties, the most famous being the Treaty of Versailles, which helped redraw the European map after all of the Central Powers lost land and several new countries were created.

After the war, the NCO Corps underwent major changes including a reorganization of ranks, the introduction of technical ranks,

and massive numbers of demotions and enlisted men being pushed out as the Army tried to reduce its numbers.

In 1922, the Army scheduled the reduction of rank for 1,600 NCOs to reduce the force and save money. With entire units being disbanded, Soldiers who had been promoted within their regiments were not allowed to take their ranks with them to their new units — instead the Soldiers went back to the rank of private. It wasn’t until 1940 that enlisted Soldiers would retain their stripes if they transferred from one unit to another.

In the 1930s, technicians were created in the Army, who wore chevrons marked with a “T.” The slots were created in the corporal, sergeant and staff sergeant grades. This newly created grade increased promotions in the technical career fields. In addition, there were 231 vocational skills that could add \$3 to \$35 to a Soldier’s pay.

With the Great Depression affecting the entire nation, NCOs faced the potential of being demoted or pushed out of the Army and also only receiving half of their pay or consumer goods and food. Desertion again became a problem in the Army. NCOs were relied upon to combat against it, as they themselves felt the pressure of staying in the Army.

During the late 1930s, NCOs fought to keep their ranks and places in the Army, while training Soldiers unique tactics learned from fighting in World War I, while watching new conflicts arise across Europe.

**World War II.** In September 1939, the world again was thrust into a global conflict after Germany unexpectedly attacked Poland, officially starting World War II. The U.S. began to supply aid to the Allied Forces of Great Britain and France against the Axis Powers of Germany and Italy. At the same time, the U.S. was watching its territories carefully in the Pacific as the Japanese began advancing across the ocean.

On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, at

Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the idea of the U.S. remaining neutral in the war ended after the Japanese launched an attack against U.S. soil, a day that President Franklin D. Roosevelt referred to as, “a date which will live in infamy.”

Being forced to assemble an Army to fight in both Europe and the Pacific, the Army began a massive recruitment of new Soldiers. The Army began using NCOs who were on active duty before the war as the primary trainers for troops destined for overseas duty. NCOs, for the first time, found themselves able to apply for transfers to new branches, as the creation of the paratroopers and paragliders offered new career opportunities. These new branches offered more pay and new challenges for NCOs looking to advance their careers.

These new branches, along with the massive mobilization, would increase the number of NCOs at a faster rate than ever in history. In 1941, the amount of NCOs in the enlisted ranks was 20 percent; that number grew to 50 percent by the end of the war in 1945.

With the vast number of casualties, enlisted men rose through the ranks very quickly during World War II. This resulted in a perceived lessening of the prestige of the NCO to some higher enlisted NCOs who obtained their ranks before the war. Soldiers were promoted quickly from private to corporal and corporal to sergeant after serving only a small amount of time in the unit.

The NCO also saw changes in the field, where in the infantry, the corporal officially was replaced as the squad leader by a sergeant, and the infantry squad grew from eight men to 12. For the first time, due to a shortage in manpower, the Army formally added women into its ranks. Women served in supply, communications, electrical, mechanical and other support careers during the war. It was a slow transition with only 11,000 women in the Army in 1941, but by the end of the war, 93,000 women wore a uniform. When



World War I: Batteries L and M, 52nd Coast Artillery Corps, 320-mm railway, Army Heavy and Railroad Artillery School, Mailly, Aube, France, May 15, 1918. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center)



the war ended, 37 percent of the women in the Army had achieved the rank of corporal or above.

In the Pacific, as the Japanese quickly advanced, troops found themselves cut off from being resupplied. NCOs were forced to prepare their units for Japanese attacks and, at the same time, find enough food to feed their troops. Many units began hunting their own meals in the form of water buffalo, horses, monkeys and other animals found on the islands.

In Europe, NCOs led troops across Africa, Italy, France, Netherlands and Germany on their way to Victory in Europe Day. During this time, NCOs led Soldiers in two of the largest operations in the history of warfare. The first being the amphibious assault of Normandy, France, during Operation Overlord, and the second being the airborne attacks in the Netherlands during Operation Market Garden.

The war in Europe officially ended in May 1945 with Germany's surrender. Three months later, in August, Japan officially surrendered after the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on the cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

That same year, Congress passed a legislation that allowed enlisted men with 20 to 29 years in service to be placed on a retirement list. The Soldier would remain in the reserve until completing 30 years of service, collecting two and a half percent of their average pay for the six months preceding the retirement.

**Korean and Vietnam Wars.** In the years following World War II, a strong emphasis was placed on education for NCOs and junior Soldiers to aid career progression. In December 1949, the first class attended the 2nd Constabulary Brigade's NCO school in Germany. Eight years later, the U.S. Armywide standards were established for NCO academies in accordance with Army Regulation 350-90. By 1959, more than 180,000 Soldiers had attended an NCO academy.

The Army also emphasized the need to advance education outside the military, and in 1952 the Army Education Program was born, which allowed credits for academic education to be attained by Soldiers. The program also helped Soldiers attain high school and college diplomas.

The U.S. Army was drawn into a conflict on foreign soil when North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950 after failed attempts to re-unify Korea under a central government. The U.S. backed South Korea, while China and the Soviet Union supported the North Korean Army.

During the battles of the Korean War,



World War II: American assault troops huddle behind the protective front of a landing craft as it nears a beachhead on the northern coast of France, June 6, 1944, D-Day. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center)

the NCO Corps found itself leading units through deep eroded hills, narrow valleys, deep gorges and thick ridges, advancing mainly in squad size elements. The Korean War also was the first time the Army entered a war as an integrated force, with black and white Soldiers fighting side-by-side in the same units.

After three years of conflict, primarily around the 38th parallel, a cease-fire was established in July 1953.

The NCO Corps saw the addition of two new ranks in 1958 — the ranks of E8 and E9. They were created to “provide a better delineation of responsibility in the enlisted structure.”

Conflict broke out in 1959 with communist North Vietnam attacking South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The first American ground troops went to Vietnam in 1965 — a conflict unlike any previously experienced. Battles took place without any clear front lines; and with the dense jungle surroundings, it was difficult to tell friend from foe. Due to the terrain and types of missions, many operations were performed at a squad- or platoon-sized element, forcing NCOs to lead Soldiers into combat with a decentralized sense of command and control.

In the U.S., the Army, realizing the potential for a long drawn out war and need for more qualified NCOs, created the NCO

Candidate Course. It was a 10-week course conducted at Fort Benning, Ga., Fort Knox, Ky., and Fort Sill, Okla. Upon graduation, the Soldier was promoted to E5, and the top five percent received a promotion to E6. Initially, this program was received with mixed feelings, as it was perceived to undermine the prestige of the NCO Corps and the journey an NCO took to join its ranks.

**Post Vietnam, 1980s and 1990s.** After the creation of the NCO Education System in 1971, NCOs continued to see growth in professional development schooling with the creation of the Primary Leadership Development Course. The Primary Leadership Development Course was created to emphasize training, duties and responsibilities for newly promoted NCOs and those about to be promoted into the NCO ranks.

At Fort Bliss, Texas, the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy became the core location where all NCO Education

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2LT Alyssa Aarhus (left), D Battery, 3rd Battalion, 43rd ADA Regiment, discusses line of sight communications, with CPL Jeremy Bagley (center) and SPC Mark Bourlier, while setting up a Patriot Missile Battery, at al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, February 15, 2003. (Photo by MSgt Terry L. Blevins, U.S. Air Force)

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System courses were written. In addition, the academy operated three separate NCO courses for specific positions in the NCO Corps. The courses were the First Sergeants, the Operations and Intelligence, and the Personnel and Logistics Courses.

In 1986, the Army established a prerequisite for promotion with the creation of Military Personnel Office Message Number 86-65. The message made it mandatory for all NCOs to attend the Primary Leadership Development Course before being promoted to sergeant; now it's required for promotion to staff sergeant. The Army mandated that all NCOs attend the Basic NCO Course before being promoted to sergeant first class and attend Advanced NCO Course before promotion to master sergeant.

A new Sergeants Major Academy was built in 1987, again confirming the strong emphasis on a well educated NCO Corps. It was a \$17 million structure that allowed the Academy to offer new courses and more NCOs a chance to further their careers.

Four years later, in 1991, the first publication of the *NCO Journal* was produced. The publication was a year in the making, with the original titles being *Sergeants Business* and *NCO Call*, before it finally became the *NCO Journal*. The *NCO Journal* — a result of the NCO Profession Leader Task Force — is a professional publication for NCOs and is the second largest Army publication.

Amidst continued progress in the NCO Education System and NCO development, the 1980s and 1990s saw NCOs engaged in

numerous conflicts around the globe. Unlike previous large-scale, drawn-out wars such as World War I and II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, these conflicts were on a much smaller scale. Only a few countries were involved in the conflicts and the amount of time fighting was reduced significantly versus previous wars. In a majority of these conflicts, NCOs found themselves leading troops in peacekeeping missions to help build relationships over a long period of time instead of traditional combat missions.

Conflict broke out in June 1982, after Israel invaded southern Lebanon. The initial Israeli objective was to push the Palestine Liberation Organization 40 kilometers back north away from the border. The U.S., along with the British, French and Italians, known as the Multinational Forces in Lebanon, sent servicemembers into the region to help restore peace between Israel and Lebanon.

A year later, in October 1983, the U.S. invaded Grenada — the first major military operation since the Vietnam War. The conflict began after the assassination of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. Besides helping restore the pre-revolutionary constitution to the people of Grenada, NCOs led a rescue search for American students located at a local university. The entire conflict lasted less than two months.

In December 1989, 27,000 U.S. servicemembers invaded Panama to remove Manuel Noriega, after a rigged presidential election in which Noriega proclaimed himself "President for Life" over

Panama. A few days after the invasion, Noriega surrendered and was flown back to the U.S. to face trial.

The 1990s saw NCOs in Saudi Arabia after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Operation Desert Shield was initiated as a defensive measure to stop the Iraqi Army from potentially invading Saudi Arabia. On February 24, 1991, after a month of air strikes, NCOs led Soldiers against the Iraqi Forces in the largest armored battle in the history of warfare. The operation was such a huge success that less than 100 hours after the initial attack, President George H. W. Bush ordered a cease-fire.

A humanitarian aid mission forced NCOs back into conflict in Somalia from 1992-1993. Mass famine struck the nation, as a result of General Mohamed Farrah Aidid and his soldiers' preventing poverty-stricken civilians getting food to eat. The U.S. and U.N. intervened to aid the local populous. Unknown to them at the time, the guerilla warfare fought in the streets of Mogadishu and surrounding cities would be a prelude to the type of warfare NCOs would face in the 21st century during Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

The U.S. again assumed the role of peacekeeper and helped prevent "ethnic cleansing," after conflicts broke out in Bosnia in 1994 and in Kosovo in 1999. To this day, Soldiers remain in both countries as part of North Atlantic Treaty Organization peacekeeping missions.

After participating in numerous conflicts around the globe, each with its own unique lessons, the NCO Corps looked toward the new millennium with high hopes for the future.

**O**FF, OIF and the future of the NCO. On September 11, 2001, the entire nation watched as terrorists



struck the World Trade Towers in New York, and the Pentagon, and attempted to use another plane to strike the White House. A few days after, President George W. Bush addressed the world, calling for aid in fighting against terrorism, beginning with destroying terrorist infra-structures in Afghanistan.

A month later, U.S. and British forces started bombing Afghanistan, as Operation Enduring Freedom officially began. In November 2001, U.S. and allied forces established the first forward operation base in Afghanistan.

In January 2002, troops were sent to the island of Basilan, Philippines, to support the Armed Forces of the Philippines by ridding the island of terrorist forces.

Later, in October 2002, Camp Le Monier was established in Djibouti, Africa, to reduce the risk of potential terrorist organizations in the Horn of Africa and to aid in humanitarian missions.

In March 2003, NCOs were on the front lines in Iraq, as Operation Iraqi Freedom began. By December, U.S. forces captured Saddam Hussein, ending his reign of terror over Iraq.

NCOs were responsible for quickly training their Soldiers on the various types of improvised explosive devices and shoot/don't shoot drills, as it became difficult to distinguish who was friend or foe. Unlike previous conflicts where NCOs led Soldiers against another nation's army, they found themselves fighting against individuals. This enemy was not wearing a distinctive uniform, but blended themselves into the crowd, making it harder to distinguish who was a threat.

Urban guerilla warfare became a prominent means of combat as raids and attacks occurred, placing NCOs in the midst of heavily populated areas, surrounded by noncombatants.

With the new style of warfare taking place, a new field manual for operations was introduced in February 2008, *Field Manual 3-0 Operations*. *Field Manual 3-0* focused on the transformation of the Army into full-spectrum operations, in which NCOs find themselves filling logistical, theater support cooperation, and reception, staging and integration onward movement roles, in addition to the traditional combat jobs.

NCO training has been re-evaluated and changed to support the current operations being conducted across the globe. In 2005, the Army changed its Primary Leadership Development Course to reflect a new curriculum that includes lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, a reinforced focus



Soldiers assigned to 1-319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment fire their M119A1 105-mm lightweight towed howitzers in Kandahar, Afghanistan, Sept. 5, 2002. (Photo by SGT Sean Terry, U.S. Army)

on weapon immersion and an emphasis on small-team leadership; the Army also renamed it the Warrior Leader's Course to reflect the overall change in philosophy.

As NCOs continue to lead troops in combat operations supporting OEF and OIF, the role of the NCO Corps has continued to evolve. In the streets of America, NCOs are looking for the next qualified applicant to join the Army, as NCOs act as recruiters, helping maintain the Army's strength. Currently, there are 9,414 NCOs working as recruiters to ensure that the Army is at full strength.

After applicants join the Army and arrive at basic training, they are met by a select group of NCOs who train, prepare and mentor new Soldiers for what to expect in their Army career — drill sergeants. "This we'll defend" is the inscription worn on the drill sergeants' badge as a symbol of the determination, devotion and consistent readiness of the American Soldier.

Drill sergeants have nine weeks to mold and prepare new Soldiers in the basic fundamentals of soldiering before sending them to their Advanced Individual Training courses, where NCOs instruct them on the specifics of their career fields.

Senior NCOs act as battle staff NCOs, who are the driving force in interlacing vital information from various sections in the command to maintain an overview of the fight.

NCOs also are the primary testers of new equipment before approval for mass distribution. Some of these projects include the Land Warrior Integrated Modular Fighting System, the Javelin anti-armor missile, the XM25 semiautomatic, the

XM312 machine gun and the SM3300 grenade launcher.

In 2009, the NCO Corps is being recognized formally for all its efforts. "The Secretary of the Army and I have declared [this year], the year of the [NCO]," said Army Chief of Staff, General George W. Casey. "This is to recognize the role that our NCO Corps has played in holding this Army together and leading it to victory in this long war. I firmly believe that we would not be here today without the role that our NCOs have played every day."

Now in its 234th year, the NCO Corps has been through numerous conflicts in defense of freedom and the nation. From fighting for independence against the British, to fighting family and friends during the Civil War, the NCO Corps was there from stopping the Nazis in World War II, to preventing the spread of communism in Korea and Vietnam, to fighting the War on Terrorism, the NCO Corps always has been there when its country needed it the most, continually solidifying itself as the "backbone" of the Army. ■

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